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Encountering UFOs and aliens in the tourism industry

Daniel William Mackenzie Wright

Abstract

Purpose – Human fascination in the unidentified flying objects (UFOs) and alien paranormal phenomenon is rich in history, explored widely in popular culture and many personal beliefs exist across society. The tourism industry offers a range of places where consumers can encounter such a phenomenon. Reports continue to highlight the growth in consumers participating at UFO and alien tourism attractions and locations. Significantly, the purpose of this paper is to shine a light on the relationship between UFOs, aliens and the tourism industry.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper takes a pragmatic philosophical approach by embracing a multi-disciplinary analysis. This study examines a range of secondary data information, statistics, reports and research studies.

Findings – By identifying the current impotence of the UFO and alien tourism markets and the growing consumer participation in it, this paper presents a theoretical starting point in the form of a model, which maps the current landscape of the industry from supply and demand perspectives. This study should be seen as a stepping stone towards further research into the UFO and alien tourism industry and provide researchers with a theoretical platform and novel ideas through which to explore the subject.

Originality/value – The phenomenon includes an established eclectic mix of attractions and likewise tourist motivations for visiting are wide and diverse. However, the subject lacks academic consideration. Thus, this paper presents original research and timely discussions on the topic.

Keywords Tourism, Demand, Supply, Aliens, Paranormal, UFO

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

"More than 10,000 sightings have been reported, the majority of which cannot be accounted for by any "scientific" explanation, e.g. that they are hallucinations, the effects of light refraction, meteors, wheels falling from aeroplanes and the like [...] They have been tracked on radar screens [...] and the observed speeds have been as great as 9,000 mph. I am convinced that these objects do exist and they are not manufactured by any nation on earth. I can, therefore, see no alternative to accepting the theory that they come from an extraterrestrial source" Air Chief Marshall Lord Dowding, Commanding Officer of the Royal Air Force (RAF) during World War II (WWII) (Heseltine, 2020a, 2020b).

Across society there is extensive interest in engaging with narratives and stories related to what some call the paranormal, things unknown and unexplainable to humans. Within the paranormal field is the topic of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) and aliens. Since the mid-20th century, as a result of unusual sightings and events in the skies, reports began to unfold that made us believe that we are truly not alone in the universe or at least place us in a position of uncertainty. As stories of UFO sightings began to emerge across the globe, figures in power came forth and shared their tales of unworldly sightings, further fuelling people's interests. Resultingly, towards the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, society has been overwhelmed by fictional and non-fiction narratives of UFOs and

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aliens. Our television (TV) screens, literature and even news channels have presented us with an array of different stories, adding even more fuel to the burning desire and ultimate question, are we alone in the universe? We do not have an answer to this, but what we do have is an incredibly diverse interest and level of belief towards the paranormal phenomenon of UFOs and aliens. The impact of this interest has had a significant impression on the tourism industry, both from supply and demand perspectives. Tourists travel far and wide to engage with UFO and alien activities and their motives are just as diverse as the range of locations available for tourists to consume such paranormal phenomenon.

At present, the academic tourism literature is lacking investigation and understanding of our human fascination and attraction to UFOs and aliens. Therefore, this research provides original discussions on a topic area that is underwhelming lacking in academic consideration. This paper explores the growth and expansion of our fascination (in UFOs and aliens) by drawing on predominantly key periods in the 20th and 21st centuries. The study also explores the role of popular culture in broadening the narrative, how the media continues to spread the narrative across society and accordingly, how UFO and alien tourism attractions have grown and diversified globally. By examining the past and considering present (UFO and alien) interest and tourism activity, this research offers a model aiming to map the landscape of supply and demand in UFO and alien tourism. Importantly, the research also provides some future considerations for the industry and potential areas requiring further research.

Methodology

This paper offers novel discussions and theory on a subject of tourism that has limited coverage in the academic sphere, that of UFOs and aliens. Importantly, it addresses the growth in our fascination towards UFO and alien paranormal phenomenon and its relationship to the tourism industry. To achieve this, the research method applied involved the examination of both qualitative and quantitative information, allowing the researcher to develop a more all-inclusive understanding of the topic. Subsequently, presenting comprehensive discussions and drawing logical conclusions from them. Pragmatic philosophical approaches embrace multi-disciplinary studies as they attempt to produce holistic considerations to social conditions. The significance of the pragmatic approach in this case is because of its philosophical foundations. The pragmatic approach is often seen as the philosophical partner to the mixed method approach to research, an approach that recognises the strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Maxcy, 2003). Through the application of a pragmatic approach to the study, the researcher embraced both constructivist and positivist views on how society operates and interprets information. The method of (qualitative and quantitative) data analysis and inquiry in this study took a desk-based approach (Wright, 2016, 2018, 2019; Yeoman and Mars, 2012; Yeoman, 2012), with the researcher examining secondary information, statistics, reports and research.

Our fascination with unidentified flying objects, aliens and the paranormal

Before identifying the key moments in which our fascination with UFOs, aliens and the paranormal expanded, it is necessary to explain the three independently:

1. *UFO*: is defined as an object seen in the sky that is thought to be a spacecraft from another planet (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020a).
2. *Alien*: relating to creatures from another planet; an alien spacecraft (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020b).

3. *Paranormal*: impossible to explain by known natural forces or by science; paranormal powers/events/forces ([Cambridge Dictionary, 2020c](#)).

It is evident from the definitions, that while each are distinctive, what all three do entail are unknown phenomenon that humans cannot explain. UFOs focus on UFOs, spacecraft that could be seen to be from another planet. Alien's is a focus on the "other beings" from outer space. While the term "paranormal" focusses on natural forces that humans are not able to explain, and here what is often considered in line with UFO and aliens, could refer to unusual events, such as crop circles. In this paper, the paranormal is used as the concept of the unknown with the unknown being UFOs and aliens. Explaining the widespread interest in UFOs has and continues to be a challenging task ([Eghigian, 2019](#)). According to [Tracey \(2014\)](#), UFOs have held our fascination for at least 10,000 years. Furthermore, "the Chhattisgarh state department of archaeology and culture recently found 10,000-year-old rock paintings in caves under the tribal Bastar region that depict aliens and UFOs". According to archaeologist J. R. Bhagat, the beings portrayed in the paintings show similarities to aliens depicted in mainstream films, suggesting our ancestors in prehistoric times could have seen or like us, imagined beings from other planets ([Tracey, 2014](#)). Nigel Watson (author of the Haynes UFO Investigations Manual) suggests that flying saucers, UFOs and other weird objects in the sky have been depicted throughout the history of humanity and many of these are visible in paintings and works of art. Images that appear to be UFOs and aliens appear in the cave paintings of ancient man, religious paintings of the Renaissance period and in the works of chroniclers and storytellers. For example, a painting by Aert De Gelder in 1710 named, *The Baptism of Christ* portrays a stunning vision of a circular craft beaming rays of light, which illuminate Jesus and John the Baptist. The painting can be viewed at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge ([Educating Humanity, 2014](#)). More recently, and from a fictional perspective many point to *The War of the Worlds* (a science fiction novel) by English author H. G. Wells in 1897, as a key moment in capturing audience attention on the subject, and subsequently, the idea by Wells has influenced many (non)fictional narratives and writers thereafter.

A key moment in time, where the narrative shifted from fiction to non-fiction was the following. It all began the afternoon of 24 June 1947. Kenneth Arnold, a private pilot, was flying his plane near Mount Rainier in the northwestern part of the USA, when he saw what appeared to be nine bat-shaped objects flying in a pattern at an amazing speed. Upon landing, he told reporters what he saw. They "flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across water", he replied when asked about how they moved. Knowing a good headline when he saw it, one keen reporter dubbed them "flying saucers". Within 6 weeks, 9 out of 10 Americans said they had heard of the term "flying saucer". A meme was born [...] and an obsession ([Eghigian, 2019](#)). In his edited text, *UFO Religions*, Professor Christopher [Partridge \(2003\)](#) suggests that before the 1940s very few people would have responded yes to the question, do you believe in UFOs? [Partridge \(2003\)](#) also identifies the 24th June 1947 as a key moment. It was on this date when Kenneth Arnold (American businessman from Boise), flying his own private jet close to Mount Rainier (Western Washington) reported a sighting of 10 shiny discs over the Cascade Mountains. While other sightings of strange objects had been reported, particularly, by fighters during the Second World War, it was Arnold's "flying saucers" that truly led to a new wave of modern popular interest in UFOs, an interest that was immediate and massive ([Partridge, 2003](#)). Weeks after Arnold's case, the most famous alleged UFO incident occurred in Roswell, New Mexico. Again, the cultural impact and significance was huge and has played a significant part in the current popular culture surrounding UFOs and aliens today. It was in 1980 with the publication of *The Roswell Incident* by Charles Berlitz and William Moore that really took the incident onto an international scale. In the book, the authors suggested that the USA Air Force had recovered strange-looking debris with odd symbols inscribed, and significantly, they claimed that a second site, where a larger crash took place led to the recovery of several non-looking human bodies, one of which was said to still be alive and capable of telepathic

communication (Partridge, 2003). In 1995, apparent footage of the claimed autopsy on an extraterrestrial was released, further fuelling conspiracy theories and general interest (Partridge, 2003, p. 6).

It is important to note here that UFO sightings increased during the World Wars. Janos (2020) discusses the mysterious UFO sightings by WWII airmen, which remain unexplained. Janos (2020), notes that many theories try to explain why there were so many sightings around that period. Theories pointed to UFO sightings actually being combat flares, weather balloons or pilot “combat fatigue”, due to stress. Of course, they remain theories, and no evidence to prove either way has ever been provided, especially that of collective psychosis (combat fatigue). Other theories pointed to a 32-year-old wunderkind rocket engineer, named Wernher Von Braun, who helped the Nazis develop the V-2 rocket. The rocket was a long-range guided ballistic missile (used by Hitler in 1944 against Belgium and other parts of Allied Europe). It is suggested that pilots might have been unfamiliar with long-range ballistics, and therefore, compared these rockets to cigar-like wingless planes. It is a fair stance to suggest that the world wars, which witnessed significant advancements in aviation warcraft, could have provided new aircraft, which pilots mistakenly believed to be UFOs. It was also during the mid to latter half of the 20th century that humans developed rockets that could overcome the force of gravity and reach orbital velocities. The result, the human desire for space exploration finally became a reality. On Oct. 4 in 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1 into space (its first artificial satellite). On April 12, 1961, Russian Lt. Yuri Gagarin became the first human to orbit Earth in Vostok 1. The first US satellite, Explorer 1, went into orbit on Jan. 31, 1958 and in 1961, Alan Shepard became the first American to fly into space. On July 20, 1969, astronaut Neil Armstrong took “one giant leap for mankind” as he stepped onto the moon. This was followed by Six Apollo missions to explore the moon between 1969 and 1972 (Aerospace, 2018). UFO sightings were also prominent during this period, a time when space aviation technology saw significant advancement. Again, UFO sceptics also point to space aviation as a potential answer to mysterious UFO sightings around this time. Correctly or not, with significant developments in (military, passenger and space) aviation, the skies were becoming more populated by aircraft, aviation technology that would not have been common knowledge to many in society.

Eghigian (2019) suggests, our fascination with UFOs and aliens has changed and evolved over time. Its heyday was during the 1970s, 1980s and early-1990s when there were reports of sightings from all over the world. During this period, UFO organisations and periodicals sprouted up and thrived not just in Europe and North America but in South America, Africa, Australia, China and India. This was followed by an increase in books about flying saucers, ancient astronauts and alien abduction stories became bestsellers. Likewise, popular cinema and TV took the interest to a wider market, as films like “Close Encounters of the Third Kind” and shows such as “In Search Of” and “The X-Files” pulled in massive audiences, more on these later (Eghigian, 2019). Moreover, the growing literature on the topic, there are numerous UFO organisations and networks. For example, the British UFO Research Association, the Mutual UFO Network and the Centre for UFO studies. The latter of which is founded by astronomer, J. A. Hynek who publishes the *International UFO Reporter* and the more scholarly *Journal of UFO Studies* (Partridge, 2003, p. 3). SETI, *The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence* founded in 1984, employs 130 scientists, educators and administrative staff, is currently one of the more commonly cited and called upon organisations. SETI is a nonprofit scientific research institute headquartered in Mountain View, California. The institute is a key research contractor to The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Science Foundation, and they collaborate with industry partners throughout Silicon Valley and beyond. Work at SETI is anchored by three centres, namely, the Carl Sagan Centre for the Study of Life in the Universe (research), the Centre for Education and the Centre for Outreach. The SETI institute aims to explore: What is life? How did it begin? Are we alone? The SETI Institute state that they have

a “passion for discovery and for passing knowledge along as scientific ambassadors”. Their mission, “to explore, understand and explain the origin and nature of life in the universe and the evolution of intelligence” (SETI, 2019).

We even have a dedicated day to celebrate UFOs. World UFO Day is celebrated annually on the 2nd of July. “Each year World UFO Day helps us spread our message and open the eyes of people. The mainstream media helps us each year to reach open hearts and minds. In 2020, we will spread the word even further! Reaching thousands, maybe millions” (World UFO Day, 2020). The debate on UFOs and aliens will persist, especially when no conclusive evidence exists or at least the mysteries surrounding past events continues. What cannot be dismissed is the societal importance of believing in them, the availability of different literature and movies created and the attractions that exist globally (covered shortly). As noted by Partridge (2003), reports and studies on UFOs can range from the ridiculous to complete fabrication. However, the professor notes, when attending gatherings with UFO enthusiasts, also known as “ufologists”, he found that many are hard-working intelligent people who are committed to exposing shoddy stories of encounters and research publications and are focussed on high standards of research and scrutiny of government documents. According to Andrew Siemion (director of the Berkeley SETI research centre) “objective description of any phenomena should be backed up by compelling evidence, and despite many decades of reports of various UFO and abduction phenomena, we do not have such evidence. Moreover, astronomers spend their lives looking at the sky with a wide variety of telescopes and techniques, and we have never snapped a picture of [an unexplained] spaceship” (Drake, 2017).

While it remains challenging to explain why there exists widespread interest in UFOs, a key passage in time was during the Cold War. Mark Pilkington is a writer with a fascination in seeking beyond the common shores of culture, science and belief. He explores this period of time in his book, “Mirage Men: A Journey into Disinformation, Paranoia and UFOs: The Weird Truth Behind UFOs”. While travelling across America, Pilkington seeks to explain one of his own UFO sighting experiences. Having explored the history of aliens and discussed the subject with former air force and intelligence insiders, Pilkington concludes that instead of covering up tales of UFO crashes and alien visitors, it was in the interest of the USA military and intelligence services to promote them all along (during the Cold War). Promoting UFO activity was seen as a useful cold war counter-intelligence operation (Pilkington, 2010). The impact of this, during this time was significant because many people in government and army positions began sharing their own stories.

Quotes by people of importance and power: fuelling the narrative

“Trust but verify” Ronald Reagan (Shevchenko, 2019).

“Doveriyai, no proveryai” is a Russian proverb meaning, “that a responsible person always verifies everything before committing himself to a common business with anyone, even if that anyone is totally trustworthy” (Shevchenko, 2019). Do people in society question what they read or does society often take the word of people in power to be true, without considering potential agendas? As noted by Pilkington (2010), governments were encouraging the spread of UFO stories as a cover up to counter intelligence operations. Whichever stance one takes, it cannot be understated that the influence of people in power coming out and sharing their own experiences further fuels societies interest and fascination in UFOs. As noted above, a key period driving our current interest in UFOs and aliens was 1947 onwards. Table 1 offers a list of quotes from people in important positions sharing their beliefs and experiences on the potential existence and or sightings of UFOs.

There is no underlying evidence to validate the comments of those in Table 1 or if the individuals had ulterior motives for sharing such comments with the wider community. What is important, is the impact of them, and again, how these comments fuelled the narrative

Table 1 UFO and alien quotes from people in power

<i>Individual – position</i>	<i>Quote/comment</i>
Dr Paul Santorini regarding UFOs seen over Greece in 1946	"Before we could do anymore, the army, after conferring with (US) officials, ordered the investigation stopped"
US President Harry S. Truman (1950)	"I can assure you that flying saucers, given that they exist are not constructed by any power on earth"
FBI memorandum by Air Intelligence Officer Commander Boyd (1952)	"The objects sighted may possible be from another planet . . . at the present time there is nothing to substantiate this . . . but the possibility is not being overlooked. . . . Intense research is being carried out by Air Intelligence. . . . The Air Force is attempting in each instance to send up jet interceptor planes"
Royal Air Force Commanding Officer Air Chief Marshall Lord Hugh (1954)	"Of course the flying saucers are real – and they are interplanetary . . . the cumulative evidence for the existence of UFOs is quite overwhelming and I accept the fact of their existence"
Major General Joe W. Kelly, 1957	"Air Force interceptors still pursue UFOs as a matter of national security to this country and to determine technical aspects involved"
Darling Observatory Astronomer Dr Frank Halstead (1957)	"Many professional astronomers are convinced that [flying] saucers are interplanetary machines"
Navy Admiral Delmar Fahrney in a public statement during 1957	"Reliable reports indicate there are objects coming into our atmosphere at very high speeds and controlled by thinking intelligences"
Lt. Colonel Richard Headrick, radar bombing expert, 1959	"Saucers exist (I saw two). They were intelligently flown or operated (evasive tactics, formation flight, hovering). They were mechanisms, not US weapons, nor Russian. I presume they are extraterrestrial"
Roscoe Hillenkoetter, Former CIA Director, public statement, 1960	"Behind the scenes, high-ranking Air Force officers are soberly concerned about UFOs. However, through official secrecy and ridicule, many citizens are led to believe that unknown flying objects are nonsense"
NASA X-15 pilot Major Robert White (1962)	"There are things out there! There absolutely is!"
Dr James McDonald before Congress, 1968	"My own present opinion, based on two years of careful study, is that UFOs are probably extraterrestrial devices engaged in something that might very tentatively be termed 'surveillance'"
Apollo 17 Commander Eugene Cernan (1973)	"I have been asked [about UFOs] and I have said publicly I thought they were somebody else, some other civilisation"
Chief of NASA Communications Systems Maurice Chatelaine (1979)	"All Apollo and Gemini flights were followed, both at a distance and sometimes also quite closely, by space vehicles of extraterrestrial origin – flying saucers or UFOs, if you want to call them by that name"
Air Marshall Azim Daudpota, Zimbabwe speaking about a UFO sighting over the country in 1985	"This was no ordinary UFO. Scores of people saw it. It was no illusion, no deception, no imagination"
Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev (1990s)	"The phenomenon of UFOs does exist, and it must be treated seriously"

Sources: [Heseltine \(2020a, 2020b\)](#); [Spignesi and Birnes \(2019\)](#)

and fascination behind UFOs and aliens. As quoted by Yuli Khariton "if there is no truth today, there will be myths tomorrow" ([Pilkington, 2010](#), p. 5). Are the non-truths of the past, today's myths and ultimately today's tourism attractions?

Unidentified flying objects and aliens in popular culture: broadening the narrative

"There can be very few people in the western world who are unaware of the contemporary significance of UFOs, extraterrestrials and stories of alien abduction in popular culture" ([Partridge, 2003](#), p. 3).

[Pilkington \(2010\)](#) suggests, "the UFO arena acts as a kind of vivarium for a range of psychological, sociological and anthropological experiences, beliefs, conditions and behaviours. They remind us that the unknown and the other are still very much at large in our modern world, and provide us with a fascinating glimpse of folklore in action. A tiny few UFO reports also still present us with genuine mysteries". People are never far away from seeing "alien faces with their large dark, almond-shaped eyes" ([Partridge, 2003](#), p. 3). Popular culture is laden with UFO and alien themed narratives and images. Some of the most popular alien-contact films include older ones, such as *Close Encounters of the Third*

Kind (1979) and *the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). More recent success films include, *Independence Day* (1996), *Mars Attacks!* (1996), *Contact* (1997), *Men in Black* (1997) and *Signs* (2002). [Table 2](#) presents popular alien movies.

While movies and television programmes have dealt with the subject matter of UFO and alien contact, other forms of popular culture also draw on the theme. In popular music, musicians such as Reg Presley of the *Troggs* are committed believers, and brands such as *Eat Static* make their interest in the area explicit with albums such as *The Alien E.P.s Implant*, *Abduction* and *The Science of the Gods* ([Partridge, 2003](#)). More recently, former *Blink-182* singer Tom DeLonge left the band and co-founded a group called *To the Stars Academy of Arts and Sciences*, an organisation committed to researching aliens ([To the Stars Academy of Arts and Science, 2020](#)) and their mission, “is to be a vehicle for change by inspiring a newfound appreciation and understanding of the universe that can have a positive impact on humanity”. One member of the team is Luis Elizondo (Director of Government Programmes and Services) is an ex Career Intelligence Officer for the USA Army, the Department of Defence, the National Counterintelligence Executive and the Office of Director of National Intelligence. One of Elizondos’ roles was *Programme Element Manager Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Programme* ([To the Stars Academy of Arts and Science, 2020](#)). In 2019, Tom DeLonge (with the academy) released a (six-part) documentary series for the *History Channel*, entitled, “Unidentified: Inside America’s UFO Investigation”. The series is “an expose on the USA Government’s secret programme to investigate the UFO phenomenon” ([IMDb, 1990/2020a](#)). There have also been many popular books exploring UFOs and aliens. One of the first books exploring UFOs or The Flying Saucer, was written by British former spy Bernard Newman in 1948. More recently, Erich von Daniken’s *Chariots of the Gods* and Whitley Strieber’s *Communion* have appeared on bestsellers list, the former being described as “the bestselling book of modern times” ([Partridge, 2003](#)). [Table 3](#) presents [Pilkington’s \(2010\)](#) top 10 UFO/alien books of all time, offering a mixture of informative, entertaining, puzzling (or all 3 at once) narratives.

The importance of popular culture cannot be understated. Popular culture, in embracing the UFO and alien phenomenon has played a significant role in broadening the narrative. This

Table 2 Aliens in movies	
<i>Alien movies</i>	<i>Description</i>
Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977) Director: Steven Spielberg	Roy Neary, an electric lineman, watches how his quiet and ordinary daily life turns upside down after a close encounter with a UFO
Alien (1979) Director: Ridley Scott	After a space merchant vessel receives an unknown transmission as a distress call, one of the crew is attacked by a mysterious life form and they soon realise that its life cycle has merely begun
E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial (1982) Director: Steven Spielberg	A troubled child summons the courage to help a friendly alien escape Earth and return to his home world
Aliens (1986) Director: James Cameron	Ellen Ripley is rescued by a deep salvage team after being in hypersleep for 57 years. The moon that the Nostromo visited has been colonised, but contact is lost. This time, colonial marines have impressive firepower, but will that be enough?
Independence Day (1996) Director: Roland Emmerich	The aliens are coming and their goal is to invade and destroy Earth. Fighting superior technology, mankind’s best weapon is the will to survive
District 9 (2009) Director: Neill Blomkamp	Violence ensues after an extraterrestrial race forced to live in slum-like conditions on Earth finds a kindred spirit in a government agent exposed to their biotechnology
Avatar (2009) Director: James Cameron	A paraplegic Marine dispatched to the moon Pandora on a unique mission becomes torn between following his orders and protecting the world he feels is his home
Prometheus (I) (2012) Director: Ridley Scott	Following clues to the origin of mankind, a team finds a structure on a distant moon, but they soon realise they are not alone
Alien Covenant (2017) Director: Ridley Scott	The crew of a colony ship, bound for a remote planet, discover an uncharted paradise with a threat beyond their imagination and must attempt a harrowing escape
Source: IMDb (1990/2020b)	

Table 3 Books on UFOs

<i>Alien books</i>	<i>Description</i>
The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects by Edward J. Ruppelt (1956)	An insider's account of the crucial, early days of the UFO story, by the man who headed the USA Air Force's official UFO investigation from 1951 to 1953. Ruppelt documents shifting Air Force attitudes to the phenomenon, which ranged from aggressive denial to apparent endorsement of alien visitation in an infamous 1952 Life magazine article. In a revised edition, published in 1960, Ruppelt was more dismissive of the subject. He died the same year, aged 37
Flying Saucer Pilgrimage by Bryant and Helen Reeve (1957)	A charming glimpse into the early days of the UFO culture, when the lines between spiritualism, occultism and ufology were largely indistinguishable. The Reeves travelled the USA in search of "the Saucerers", meeting many key figures of the time before making contact with real Space People via the wonders of Outer Space Communication (OSC) and a portable tape recorder. Many important questions are answered: How do we look to the space people? Do they believe in Jesus Christ? Is this civilisation ending?
Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky by Carl Jung (1958)	It was only natural that the Swiss mystic and philosopher-shrink, fascinated by anomalous experiences, should turn his attention to the UFO mystery. Considering UFOs as a "visionary rumour" and a manifestation of the mythic unconscious, Jung compares the perfect circle of the flying disc to the mandala, notes the dreamlike impossibility of many reports and presciently recognises the deep spiritual pull that the UFO would exert over the next half century
The UFO Experience By J. Allen Hynek (1972)	Astronomer Hynek was an air force consultant on UFOs for much of his life, and over time transformed from something of a Doubting Thomas to a St Paul. He is regarded as a saint in UFO circles, largely for this book, a sober yet sympathetic overview of the UFO problem that excoriates the USA Air Force for their failure to treat the phenomenon seriously. Hynek devised the "Close Encounters" system for categorising UFO sightings, and has a cameo during the cosmic disco climax of Spielberg's blockbusting film (that is him with the pipe looking like Colonel Sanders)
The Mothman Prophecies by John Keel (1975)	Merging unconscious deceptions with deliberate fictions, many of the wilder UFO books would have even the most intrepid postmodernists cowering behind the sofa. Keel, however, was a two-fisted trickster who knew exactly what he was doing and this reads like Thomas Pynchon crossed with Philip K Dick channelling HP Lovecraft. In the late 1960s Point Pleasant, West Virginia was plagued by bizarre entities, UFO sightings and robotic, jelly-fixated Men in Black; Keel investigated only to find himself in too deep and the town doomed to real-life disaster
Messengers of Deception by Jacques Vallée (1979)	An intriguing, disconcerting book from one of the field's most progressive thinkers. Vallée, a French Astronomer and Computer Scientist who worked with J Allen Hynek, became entangled in bizarre mind games while investigating UFO cults in the 1970s. Amongst others, Vallée encountered HIM (Human Individual Metamorphosis), led by "Bo and Peep" who would steer the Heaven's Gate group to their collective death two decades later
Report on Communion by Ed Conroy (1989)	Whitley Strieber's Communion is one of the 20th century's great literary mysteries and Conroy's spinoff is just as curious. A hard-nosed investigative journalist, Conroy examined Strieber's alleged alien abduction experiences and odd life story while also researching the history of UFOs and its parallels in folkloric encounter narratives. In a testament to the power of UFO ria and the allure of the Other, by the end of the book he is being buzzed by shape-shifting helicopters and wondering whether he too has had contact with the visitors
Remarkable Luminous Phenomena in Nature by William Corliss (2001)	One of at least 18 hardback volumes of anomalies collected by this modern-day Charles Fort. Ball lightning (miniature, giant, black, object-penetrating and ordinary), bead lightning, lightning from clear skies, pillars of light, glowing owls, luminous bubbles, oceanic light wheels, earthquake lights, marsh gas, unusual auroras, glowing fogs. In addition, that is just for starters. I love this book
The Trickster and the Paranormal by George Hansen (2001)	Hansen, a former professional laboratory parapsychologist, provides illumination, insight and perspective on the wider paranormal research field, UFOs included. Drawing on folklore, anthropology, literary theory and sociology, Hansen points out the integral, destabilising role of Trickster archetypes in human society. While dwelling predominantly amongst its esoteric fringes, the Trickster can also be seen lurking in the corridors of political, military and corporate power
Out of the Shadows by David Clarke and Andy Roberts (2002)	A rock-solid history of the UFO phenomenon in Britain by two of our most reliable and indefatigable researchers. Clarke and Roberts work from interviews and official documentation detailing everything from genuine aerial mysteries during the second world war (investigated for the RAF by the Goon Show's Michael Bentine) to the cold war follies of 1980s Rendlesham Forest incident. Serious UFO research as it should be done

Source: [Pilkington \(2010\)](#)

has been done through various means, from fictional movies, TV shows and novels, which, through different genres, explore the topic from dystopian nightmare (Independence Day) to friendly adventures (ET). While non-fictional coverage presents documentaries, reports and books aiming to expose the truth behind sightings and abductions, offering more serious narratives, often attempting to explain paranormal footage, stories and events. All of which have seen society being engulfed with a variety of narratives and information that continues to spread the UFO and alien mystery and continues to ignite a wide and varied interest on the topic.

Media coverage on unidentified flying objects and aliens: spreading the narrative

The media also play a significant role, as their stories have the potential to spread the narrative across a wide audience. The following section shares some examples of more recent stories that have been presented in the news. In 2017, a story emerged that the USA Government recovered material from an UFO that it did not recognise. The Pentagon reportedly recovered metal alloys that scientists did not recognise (Embury-Dennis, 2017; Cooper, Blumenthal and Kean, 2017). It was reported that Washington spent \$600bn on its annual Defence Department budgets, of which, \$22m was spent on the *Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Programme*, which ran between 2007 and 2012, and was tasked with investigating reports of UFOs (Osborne, 2017). For many years, the aim of the programme was to investigate reports of UFOs and was run by a military intelligence official, Luis Elizondo on the fifth floor of the Pentagon's C Ring, deep within the building's maze (Cooper *et al.*, 2017). In 2017 and 2018, declassified US military videos, which were released by "To The Stars Academy of Arts & Sciences" according to Navy spokesperson Joe Gradisher, were said to be "unidentified aerial phenomena" (Andrew, 2019). The video footage, one taken in 2004 and two 2015 appear to show fast-moving objects captured by advanced infrared sensors. In the latter (2015), the footage contains audio from fighter pilots attempting to make sense of what they were witnessing. On Monday April 27, 2020, the three clips, named, "FLIR", "GOFAST" and "GIMBAL" appeared for the first time on the Naval Air Systems Command Website. The release of the videos is evidence of the US Navy officially acknowledging that its pilots encountered so-called unidentified aerial phenomena or UFOs (Pawlyk, 2020).

In October 2017, astronomers captured a cigar-shaped object passing through our solar system, eventually named Oumuamua (meaning "scout" in Hawaiian). A sky-surveying telescope in Hawaii spotted the fast-moving object, C/2017 U1, on 18th October. Since reviewing all the data on the strange object, which came hurtling through the solar system it has been concluded that everything about it can be explained by natural processes (The Oumuamua ISSI Team, 2019). However, the initial reporting on the object left many believing that it could have been an alien spaceship. This was further emphasised in a paper by two Harvard researchers Bialy and Loeb (2018, p. 5). In conducting a mathematical analysis of how the interstellar object sped up as it shot past the sun, one such position proposed by the two researchers was what they termed an "exotic scenario", one where "Oumuamua could be a fully operational probe sent intentionally to earth's vicinity by an alien civilisation". More recently, is a quote from Dr Helen Sharman (a 56-year-old who originally worked as a chemist before making history as the first British astronaut to participate in a mission to the Soviet modular space station in May 1991). Sharman suggested, "there is no two ways that aliens exist. There are so many billions of stars out there in the universe that there must be all sorts of different forms of life" (BBC News, 2020).

Other reports include UFOs being captured by NASA's International Space Station (ISS). UFO experts claimed that the ISS captured video footage of what seemed to an alien vessel flying near the station as the footage was being live-streamed (Fish, 2020; Monzon, 2020; Smith, 2020). The UK's Ministry of Defence (MoD) recently said it would publish secret UFO reports from the early 1950s until 2009 for the first time. A department in the UK's MoD

documented and investigated reports of UFOs during the period. More than a decade after the programme concluded, many of the formerly classified files on UFO sightings will be made available to the public. Many of the UFO sightings were reported and recorded by the RAF, and after a freedom of information request, the decision was taken to release the documents rather than send them to the National Archives (which would mean the documents would be initially classified before being released after a specific number of years). A dedicated gov.uk web page is to be created for the files ([Telegraph Reporters, 2020](#); [Weisberger, 2020](#)). Clearly, these stories do not confirm the existence of UFOs or aliens. However, continued coverage across different media outlets and government department ensures the mystery and importantly, the narrative and societal interest in UFOs and aliens spreads.

Popular culture has significantly expanded the range of narratives that exist and like the past as identified here (in a few examples), there continues to be a range of media-related stories surrounding the paranormal phenomenon. Consequently, it is suggested that continued media coverage on UFOs and aliens further legitimises or at least normalises the discussions of them and even belief in them, within the wider public domain. In so doing, allowing, even encouraging more people, especially those “on the margins” of belief and interest to indulge, express and share their own interest and opinions on the subject.

Unidentified flying objects and aliens: tourists and tourism attractions

“Turns out you do not need to storm a secretive military facility to get your extraterrestrial fix” ([Wolfe, 2020](#)).

The recent example of “Storm Area 51”, which went viral (in the summer of 2019), originally starting off as a Facebook joke, saw two million people signing up for the mass invasion of the USA secret facility for a chance to encounter aliens (at least hoping to). Resultingly, the highly classified military base was firmly back in the public eye and this led to another mounting phenomena, a growing trend in UFO tourism ([Thompson, 2019](#)). [Thompson \(2019\)](#) when visiting Area 51 (post Storm Area 51 event) spoke to a local motel owner near the location. Cody (manager of the “Little A “Le” Inn”) said bookings in UFO tourism had taken off. Cody further notes, “there is definitely been an increase in business out here in the past couple of years; we are seeing a lot more tours like yours coming through. We are still getting the diehard UFO fans, of course, but the majority of new guests are normal people like you or me, who have seen Area 51 mentioned on the news or in a movie and are curious to check it out for themselves. They come out on road trips from Las Vegas and they are looking to tick this place off their bucket lists – to stay overnight and have a story and images to share on social media before driving on”.

Roswell, New Mexico is also a well-known location due to the apparent UFO crash in July 1947. Roswell has embraced its alien-friendly status for many years. Roswell is home to many notable sites including the International UFO Museum and Research Centre to the more fun-centric McDonald’s restaurant shaped as a spaceship. Roswell has also seen a recent surge in UFO tourism ([Thompson, 2019](#)). Local businessman Dennis Balthaser arranges extraterrestrial-themed tours in Roswell. According to Balthaser, demand has increased so much that he is now required to run two tours a day, five days a week. Additionally, Balthaser says, “by the end of this year I will have cleared 300 tours. Most visitors are curious about Roswell but have very little information on what happened here. They have usually seen something on TV that is sparked their interest and they make a stop here during a longer vacation – although there is also a smaller group who have had a UFO experience of their own and want to find out more” ([Thompson, 2019](#)). While the businessman’s tourists are mainly from the USA, many others come from the UK, China, Australia, South Africa and Japan. Balthaser notes, “people know that something happened here, but they are not sure what. It is that not knowing, that mystery, that continues to drive

this. As long as we do not know the truth, and people keep speculating about theories, they will keep coming to visit places like this” (Thompson, 2019).

In a recent report, Perper (2019) suggests that alien tourism appears to be gaining popularity around the globe. Perper highlights a recent case where offbeat travellers have started visiting Khao Kala in Nakhon Sawan (translates to “City of Heaven”, and located 3 h north of Bangkok, Thailand) as they believe it is the location in which humans can connect with the extraterrestrial world. Here, humans can telepathically communicate with aliens, an ideology, suggesting that through meditation people can hear the aliens. Some followers have reported seeing UFOs and silhouettes of figures on the hilltop, while others say that alien powers have “spun them around” (Enrich, 2019; Fullerton, 2019; Perper, 2019). The commercial potential for UFO tourism is also on the rise in countries such as Chile, Sri Lanka and Japan, all of whom are seeing its potential and cashing in on the “grey dollar” industry (the industry jokingly nicknamed by some after the most frequent visualisation of alien skin tone). As identified in Table 4, in 2008, Chile opened a UFO Trail, centred on the northern town of San Clemente. The location is seen as an extra-terrestrial (ET) hub, which has generated hundreds of sightings. The location offers visitors with a 19-mile path, which is well-signposted. The path runs through the Andes above the town and the signposts navigate visitors to the main sites of the area’s most famous close encounters (Thompson, 2019). Sri Lanka has also seen the potential for extraterrestrial income, as their UFO tourism focusses on “alien mystery tours” around Anuradhapura (the capital city of the North Central

Table 4 UFO and aliens: tourism attractions

<i>Location</i>	<i>Description</i>
Roswell, New Mexico	Home to the 1947 UFO crash. The town has embraced its alien-friendly status, with alien-themed restaurants and shops, like this spaceship-shaped McDonald’s, an interactive spacewalk and the International UFO Museum and Research Centre, a non-profit museum dedicated to uncovering the mystery of the 1947 crash and other unexplained phenomena. The Roswell 2019 UFO Festival will take place from July 5-7 (Lembo, 2018)
Area 51 in Nevada	For alien enthusiasts, this is ground zero. The secret air force base in Nevada has been at the centre of extra-terrestrial speculation since the 1940s. Many believe UFO wreckage from the infamous Roswell Incident of 1947 is hidden inside this perimeter – along with the remains of its intergalactic pilots (Thompson, 2019)
Chile UFO sighting tours	A 19 mile stretch of land that loops through the Andes can be toured with their UFO spotting trip. “Sightings have been made of shining spheres going into the water and into wooded zones without any human explanation”, said the president of the Chilean Grouping for UFO Research (AION), Rodrigo Fuenzalida. Locals claim that the “200 perfectly sliced volcanic rocks built by ancient civilisations” are a perfect landing pad for flying saucers (Lembo, 2018)
Ovnipuerto Cachi, Argentina	A Swiss man built an airstrip for aliens because a UFO captain telepathically told him to (Wolfe, 2020)
Hollowcombe Bottom, Devon England	The site of a mysterious pony massacre is rich with extraterrestrial conspiracy theories. Some people blame aliens, saying the most plausible explanation is that a low-flying UFO swooped in and created a vortex that doomed the ponies. Extraterrestrial enthusiasts are convinced otherworldly beings are behind the curious deaths, though their motives remain unclear (Wolfe, 2020)
Wycliffe Well, Davenport, Australia	The UFO capital of Australia is the outback’s answer to Roswell, ranked in the top UFO spots of the world (Wolfe, 2020)
The Mountain Sphinx, Buşteni, Romania	The odd formation is one of the “Seven Wonders of Romania”. Over millions of years, the elements carved the nearly 40-foot-tall rock until it resembled something akin to a woman’s face. However, the figure’s human-like appearance is not the main attraction that draws people to it. Some people claim aliens are somehow involved (Wolfe, 2020)
UFO Memorial, Ängelholm, Sweden	In Kronoskogen, a suburb of the Swedish town of Ängelholm, a memorial was erected in 1972, to remember an alleged UFO-landing seen by Swedish ice hockey player Gösta Carlsson on May 18, 1946
Emilcin UFO memorial, Opole Lubelskie County, Poland	In 2005, a memorial was put up near the small town of Emilcin, Poland consisting of a metal cube balanced on top of a rock. It commemorates the most famous alleged UFO abduction case in Polish history, that of Jan Wolski, which was said to have taken place on May 10, 1978. The memorial to Wolski’s experience was put up by the Nautilus Foundation, a Warsaw-based organisation that “investigates” UFO incidents (Wolfe, 2020)
Disney Park Pandora	Pandora – The World of Avatar is a themed area inspired by James Cameron’s Avatar, located within Disney’s Animal Kingdom theme park at the Walt Disney World Resort in Bay Lake, Florida, near Orlando

Province). Japan's own UFO capital is Asuka, Nara Prefecture, a tiny village, which is famed for its mysterious carved granite monoliths, the biggest of them a Rock Ship of Masuda, a 15 ft-tall, 800-tonne block with a straight central ridge and two one-metre square holes cut from it (Thompson, 2019).

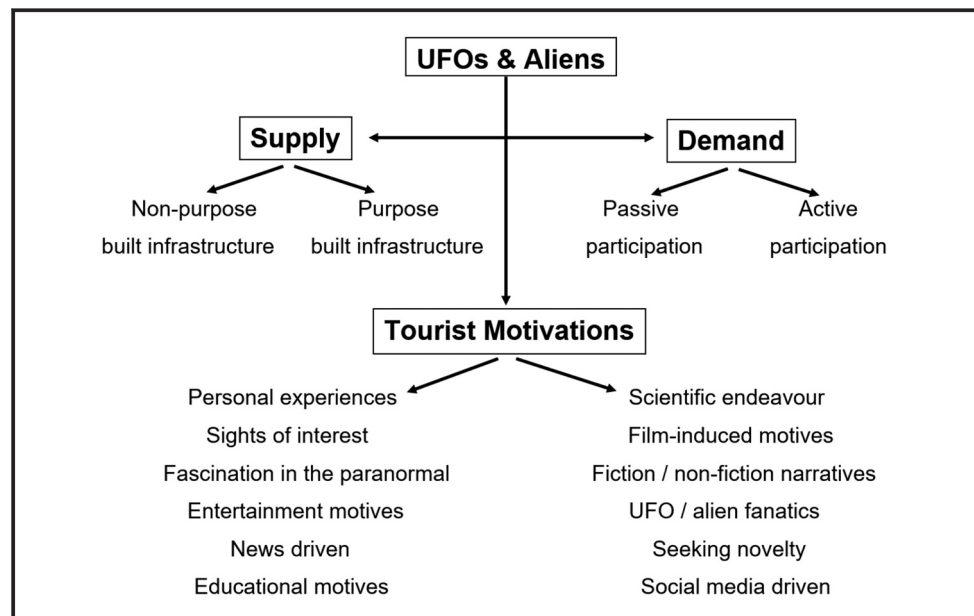
It is important to recognise the range and variety of different types of UFO and alien attractions. Table 4 showcases tourism locations and attractions, which focus on places that are based on accounts of UFO sightings (some of which are often explored in popular culture). Some of the attractions are less about sightings and actual stories of where people encountered UFO or aliens, instead, they are based on opportunistic attempts to supply experiences and attractions to the UFO and alien tourism market. In some cases, they have created attractions based on popular non-fictional entertainment. The landscape of attractions is varied. Roswell, is a great example, a location, which offers more serious approaches in museums, to more fun-themed approaches in its UFO spaceship-shaped McDonald's.

UFO and alien tourism are not limited to just locations, as annually, the event AlienCon is held. If you are a fan of Ancient Aliens, science fiction, virtual reality, pop culture or all of the above, Alien Con is calling your name. It is a weekend info-tainment event for celebration and exploration of sci-fi. Through exhibits, special presentations, interactive displays, unseen episodes of Ancient Aliens, celebrity appearances, competitions and exclusive merch, this convention brings you the ultimate extraterrestrial experience (Event Fest, 2020). The landscape of tourism is constantly evolving, as is the UFO and alien market. As tourists seek novel and new experiences, this market is beginning to witness greater consumer engagement, much like the vast diversity of beliefs and interest in the subject. The individual consumer does not need to be a devout believer, as this section has identified and the range of motivations pulling tourists to UFO and alien attractions is varied and potentially growing.

Unidentified flying object and alien tourism: a current landscape model

Drawing on the discussions above, the study has created a UFO and alien, tourist and attraction model, see Figure 1. What this research has clearly identified, is the diverse

Figure 1 UFO and aliens: the tourist and attraction landscape model



nature and landscape of UFO and alien tourism attractions and the motives for people participating in it. From a supply perspective, it considers how locations have purpose-built infrastructure and non-purpose-built infrastructure for tourists. From a demand perspective, the author has based tourism engagement on either passive or more active participation, either in visiting sites or when at sites and locations of UFO and alien interest. As for specific motives for visiting sites, the research has provided a list of categories or even typologies of potential UFO and alien tourists.

The importance of the model is how future academic researchers and the tourism industry can use it to begin to establish further understanding within the UFO and alien tourism phenomenon, from both a supply and demand perspective, which is now discussed.

The future of unidentified flying object and alien tourism

“If aliens visit us, the outcome would be much as when Columbus landed in America, which did not turn out well for the Native Americans. We only have to look at ourselves to see how intelligent life might develop into something we would not want to meet” ([Into the Universe with Stephen Hawking, 2010](#)).

The UFO and alien tourism market are vibrant and importantly they still have great potential for growth. As indented here, countries such as Japan, Sri Lanka and Chile are creating tourist experiences as they begin to see its commercial value. From a supply perspective, there is great value in mapping the tourist motivations for visiting attractions. Managers of UFO and alien tourism attractions have at their disposal a wide variety of potential consumers, as identified in the model. With such a diverse field of interest, suppliers of such attractions in the future, could create and establish tourism attractions not only at places where witnesses have claimed to see UFOs and aliens but they could create UFO and alien attractions, arguably in any location, due to the mysterious nature of the phenomenon. Credibility, is not always the driver, as can be seen by the examples in [Table 4](#) where a Swiss man built an airstrip for aliens (Ovniuerto Cachi and Argentina) because a UFO captain telepathically told him to ([Wolfe, 2020](#)), and now tourists visit the attraction. Importantly, the spreading and sharing of narratives across cultural mediums will continue, especially if UFOs and aliens remain a paranormal phenomenon, a mystery to humans. As we continue to ask the question, are we alone in the universe, society we continue to look to the skies for answers. As we move further into the 21st century, space programmes and aviation technology are also likely to play a significant role in our growing UFO and alien fascination.

Therefore, demand for experiences will also continue to grow and the wide range of tourist motives, as identified in the model will also continue to grow and widen. Partridge suggests that society is moving beyond the church and chapel and locating the “god within” or the notion of “there must be something out there”. Society continues to seek meaning in life through alternative means (beyond the church), such as yoga, Buddhism and even astrology in popular culture. Importantly, the sacred continues to show vibrant signs within our spiritual journeys with regards to our well-being, culture, education, business and health ([Partridge, 2003](#), p. 14). So, as people continue to seek answers to the meaning of life, and while these continue to remain unanswered, the idea that we are not alone compels us; for some, the paranormal, UFOs and aliens are a place to explore these deeper questions. For others, attractions based on fictional novels or film-induced narratives of little grey men are simply pure entertainment, good fun and enough to fuel their interest in UFO and alien tourism. With such diverse motives from both supply and demand perspectives, there is likely to be much more to come from the UFO and alien tourism market. While this research has begun to shine a light on it, there is much scope for further research. As noted earlier, as long as the paranormal phenomenon remains a mystery, society will continue to be fascinated in it and consequently, tourists will continue to visit-related attractions.

Interestingly, how would society, people, react if we found or encountered aliens for real? This is a vision that has been expressed in fictional narratives, but actual research is limited. While the movie industry often expresses societies reactions as somewhat dystopian, portraying scenes of chaos, crumbling buildings, fires raging, panic and hysteria as riots break out and societies collapse, the reality could arguably be different. Researchers, [Kwon et al. \(2018\)](#) in their own study examined a range of (alien-related) news headlines and their own surveys concluded that people's reactions to any potential detections of alien life, both hypothetically and to the famously false announcement of microbial fossils from Mars, are generally quite positive. Others remain less convinced, such as Seth Shostak (a Senior Astronomer at the SETI Institute). Shostak suggests that the research findings are limited because they are based people's reactions to a story that reported on microbial life (very different to the aliens we see in popular culture) and additionally, the research had a non-representative pool of respondents. According to Shostak, "I think the fact that the (slim) majority of folks seem "down" with the idea of microbes on Mars or elsewhere is hardly surprising. Grey guys are quite different, and the really interesting studies are those that try to gauge the reaction to a SETI detection or even more dramatic, discovery of alien hardware" ([Drake, 2018](#)). So, if we were to encounter or present concrete evidence of UFOs or an alien species, how society would react is unclear. Maybe there would be a growth in consumer numbers to current tourism attractions? The non-believers and the passive participants in the current market are a larger group than the active participants and believers, so the industry could see a sudden uptake in tourists – as long as they (the aliens) come in peace, of course.

Conclusion

This research has gone where very few studies have gone before, by exploring the relationship between UFOs, aliens and the tourism industry, offering original discussions on the topic. The human fascination in the paranormal phenomenon of UFOs and aliens was established at the start of the study, recognising pivotal moments throughout the 20th century, which eventually led to significant coverage in popular culture, where a wealth of movies and books were written from a range of different genres. Such coverage offered audiences, narratives from pure entertainment, individual experiences from sightings and abductions, to more non-fictional explorations into government cover-ups. All of which has led to an assortment of opinions within society and across individuals, where a spectrum of beliefs towards the potential existence of UFOs and aliens exists. This makes the subject even more interesting to research. Because of the ever-growing interest in UFOs and aliens across society and its paranormal mysteriousness, it could be said that a maze of motivations exists when attempting to understand peoples' behavioural attitudes to participating in UFO and alien tourism. This research attempts a mapping of the maze, and presents a model, which considers the current landscape of UFO and alien tourism from supply and demand perspectives. Likewise, the types of UFO and alien tourism attractions currently in the visitor market is mixed because of the variety of different perspectives on the subject, again, making the subject an exciting field of research.

Significantly, this research has highlighted the potential for future research within the subject area. Future research should focus on areas such as greater assessment into the value of the UFO and alien tourism market, something which is currently lacking. From a demand perspective, further research should continue to explore tourist motivations, expectations and desires to engage in UFO and alien tourism experiences. From a supply perspective, there is a lack of research into the current popular UFO and alien tourism attractions. Importantly, research should also explore the role of stakeholders in managing destinations, from the development of them, to purpose build infrastructure and the role of marketing and promoting (UFO and alien tourism) destinations and attractions. This study has begun to shine a light on an area of the tourism industry, which has limited coverage,

and an industry, which is potentially going to see growth in the coming years as destinations begin to establish more UFO and alien tourism experiences. At some stage, every single one of us has asked the question, are we alone in the universe and at our own individual levels, we all have a fascination in the subject. For destinations, tapping into this fascination and creating tourism experiences and attractions that appeal to the diverse motivations should be seen as a great opportunity. As we move deeper into the 21st century, and technology takes us further into the universe, who knows what we could encounter, if the mystery of UFO and aliens continues as an unknown, then the scope for such tourism experiences will also continue. If humans do encounter UFOs or aliens, then the potential could be out of this world.

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